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We love art. Art urges us to think and feel. It shows us what it is to be human. Art provides a record of our shared history and offers a way to process the beauty and chaos of the cosmos and come to grips with the world as it is today. Combining the cultural and the natural with the personal, art empowers and enlarges our experiences of living, of understanding, of communicating, of caring, and of fully realizing ourselves and our potentialities. These are reasons why quality arts education should be in our schools.

Because art is a necessary component of a comprehensive education, we must think critically about what makes quality arts programming.

Currently, one school of thought suggests we judge instruction by the product, by the work created by students in art classrooms. The world we live in overwhelmingly tells us that appearance gives art value, that art should be “pretty,” beautifying the hallways at school and winning contests. For teachers, this means: If the work coming out of your classroom doesn’t look good, you are not doing your job. This mindset is remarkably pervasive, and it trickles down from the society at large to the school leadership, the art teacher, and eventually to the student.

We feel quite the opposite. We believe this view of the value of art and the nature of quality can cause enormous damage. The pressure to produce visually stunning work compels teachers to plan lessons that will consistently produce a “good” outcome. Art teachers are experts at this. They formulate each step with the final product in mind and guide students through the creative process like a mother holding her toddler by the hand. The work looks good, but the problem with this kind of spoon-feeding is that the students don’t really get the chance to *create*. They miss the opportunity to experience the power and significance of true self-expression. They may

even be left with a misconception of what art-making is all about. To teach authentic art-making we have to take a fully holistic view.

Art is so much more than the final product—it is a process. The planning, designing, revising, and reflecting that art-making requires, skills that we call “artistic behaviors,” are activities that have enormous value in the art classroom and in the real world. If we want our students to learn how to engage with their own creativity and make art in a way that is authentic, it is essential that we offer them pathways to independence and help them practice artistic behaviors as foundational skills.

The facilitation of self-expression has to be a pervasive goal, not merely something that students will be exposed to later, when they are deemed “skilled” enough. These artistic behaviors can be directly taught as learnable skills, as part of every project, K-12. We ought to take the expectation for “pretty” out of art education and instead instill expectations for meaning and for creative thinking. The intent of this book is to help teachers accomplish these goals by providing a framework for teaching students to think like artists.